

public and we ought not to be responsible for continuing to put our national forests at increasing risk.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, this week, as the California wildfires continue to rage, scorching more than 720,000 acres of land, destroying more than 2,600 homes, and taking the lives of at least 20 people, we have learned the costs of not taking the proper steps to protect our vulnerable communities and forests.

Last April, I wrote to the President and asked him to declare three of our southern counties disasters areas due to bark beetle infestation. There were 12 of us from both parties who asked for fuels reduction to ease our dangerous situation. Unfortunately, that disaster designation did not happen.

In July, I introduced a bill with Senator LEAHY, the Forestry and Community Assistance Act, that would have helped protect our forest and communities from wildfires. The bill would have authorized funding for wildfire prevention projects including thinning, cutting of dense underbrush, and prescribed burning.

The Leahy-Boxer bill would have authorized \$1.25 billion for wildfire prevention projects on National Forest System lands, \$1.25 billion for projects on Bureau of Land Management lands, and \$2.5 billion for projects on tribal, private and State lands. The bill would have required that 85 percent of the funds be given to wildfire prevention projects within one-half mile of communities that are at risk for wildfire, and projects that are necessary to protect a municipal water supply system.

That is the bill I wish we were passing today. We are passing a bill that is far weaker, but it is better than the House bill.

It explicitly authorizes projects that protect at-risk communities, watersheds, and lands with insect infestation.

The bill also provides that 50 percent of the funds authorized for wildfire prevention projects be used toward at-risk communities. Unfortunately, my amendment to increase this percentage to 70 percent failed.

Of particular significance to California, the bill directs the Department of Agriculture to conduct a program encouraging systematic information gathering on insect pests that have caused large-scale damage to forests, including the bark beetle.

Also, I am pleased that the Senate passed my amendment requiring the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, NIOSH, to monitor the long-term health conditions of firefighters who fought in my area declared a Federal disaster.

I am also pleased the Senate passed my amendment requiring that the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, monitor the emission of hazardous pollutants in the air in disaster areas. The provision requires that the EPA accomplish this by providing each of its regional offices with a mobile air pollu-

tion monitoring network, and publish its findings on EPA's website daily until the danger has subsided.

This bill could have been made better if we had passed several amendments that I supported. These included: a Bingaman amendment to allow the Forest Service to borrow funds from the General Treasury for firefighting once its funds have been expended. Currently, once the Forest Service depletes its funds, it must borrow from other accounts within the Forest Service's budget to pay for firefighting; the Murray amendment to ensure old growth trees on all lands are protected; the Cantwell amendment to require that in undertaking efforts to prevent wildfires, all possible alternatives be considered; and the Harkin amendment to sunset the legislation after 5 years, allowing Congress to review how well the program is doing.

Despite the fact that I wanted a stronger bill, I have decided to support the bill before us, because, while not perfect, it will help make our communities safer.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, Senator MCCAIN and I intended to offer an amendment to H.R. 1904 to establish a permanent revolving fund to address the annual problem of funding emergency fire suppression needs—a problem that essentially robs funds from the very fuel reduction projects H.R. 1904 is designed to promote.

When I was in Montana this summer, I visited with some of the firefighting teams near Glacier National Park. It was absolutely amazing to see the organization and coordination that goes into fighting these fires. We had folks from Federal, State, and local agencies and local volunteer fire departments; local loggers; teams from Australia and New Zealand; and private contractors all working together to protect lives and property.

I can't tell you how impressed and overwhelmed I was by the dedication and professionalism of the firefighters on the ground. These first-rate men and women earned the deep respect and gratitude of the residents of many Montana cities and towns, particularly in West Glacier. I know that my colleagues saw much the same thing in their states, and we are all seeing it now in California.

But, this extraordinary and superior fire-fighting effort costs money—\$305 million spent in Montana alone this year to fight the fires that blanketed my state. And as is too often the case, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management were once again strapped for fire suppression funds during extreme fire conditions. They had to borrow from other program funds to get the job done in Montana and other states this summer.

The Forest Service and Department of Interior borrowed \$860 million last fiscal year to pay fire suppression costs. While recent supplemental funding for the agencies will repay some of these accounts, the agencies will still

be short \$170 million. Some Forest Service accounts will not be repaid, including accounts to rehabilitate burned areas. This is enormously counterproductive. And, it wastes scarce federal resources. This state of affairs cannot continue.

We have to be smarter about managing this situation in the future. Since we can't accurately predict wildfire suppression needs each year when we provide for appropriations, we need a special funding strategy to account for extreme fire years. The alternative is extreme disruption to Forest Service and Interior budgets and day-to-day responsibilities, important work deferred or canceled, and jobs lost.

Senator MCCAIN and I believe we have a responsible solution that is a fair, reasoned, and balanced approach to the problem. It's time we all faced up to our responsibilities to provide adequate and stable funding to the Forest Service and Interior for fire suppression efforts, while ensuring minimal disruption to their current programs and projects and encouraging these agencies to keep their costs under control.

However, Senator MCCAIN and I will not offer our amendment because Senator CRAIG and others have agreed to work with us, and with Senator BINGAMAN, to find a solution to this problem as soon as possible. I would like to see H.R. 1904 pass quickly, and I have no interest in delay. I appreciate Senator CRAIG's recognition of the problem and commitment to address it.

Mr. MCCAIN. I commend Senator BINGAMAN for his thorough analysis of the budgetary impediments to effective federal action to protect communities and our public forest lands from catastrophic wildfire. I am in agreement with many of the points that he makes because of what I have learned from numerous people in Arizona who have extensive hands-on experience with forest management and wildfire issues.

With the compromise reached on Title I of 1904, we struggled to find common ground in our understanding of the nature of the problem in each of our states. However, the budget issues and inadequacy of funding that Senator BINGAMAN has discussed has not been addressed in this legislation. The practice of borrowing program funds to fight wildfires will continue to undermine our efforts to increase protection of communities in the wildland-urban interface and enhance forest health on at-risk public lands.

Everyone involved in these endeavors at the federal, state, and local levels agrees that bankrupting essential program activities until they can be replenished at a later time with a supplemental is self-defeating. There is no disagreement on this score, it's simply a matter of putting the right funding mechanism in place to accomplish the objective of preserving the integrity of the forest land management agencies' programs.

It is my understanding that Senator CRAIG and Senator BINGAMAN have